sharpest criticism was directed against the scandals in the high places associated with the name of Rasputin, the closest friend, spiritual father, and political adviser of the Tsar. Stolypin, who up to the end opposed the rising power of the "Mad Monk," was shot to death by a revolutionary terrorist, and there were insistent rumors that police had been informed of the plot and had not taken any steps to prevent it. The Tsar seemed to be glad of having rid himself of his Prime Minister, the last strong and more or less independent man in his entourage.

Hating the Duma, the press, and the intelligentsia, haunted by the feeling of insecurity and his own inadequacy, suspicious of the advisers who might influence his decisions, distrusting his own ministers, the Tsar found counsel, support, and comfort only in Rasputin, an illiterate adventurer who posed as a true Russian muzhik and holy man, preaching unrestricted debauchery as a way to repentance and salvation. Rasputin was a shrewd, calculating faker, the most resourceful among the many charlatans who surrounded the throne. Using the technique of primitive hypnotism of a Siberian medicine man to comfort the sick Tsarevich, he had ingratiated himself with the Tsar and the hysterical Tsarina. At the same time he enjoyed the support of the Black Hundreds by serving as its mouthpiece in the palace. Rasputin had appeared at the court in 1909, but only after the death of Stolypin did he advance to the position of unofficial ruler of the Empire in religious and political affairs as the Tsar's "dear friend." Now, in 1913, towering above the traditional pageantry of the court, eclipsing the Tsar, stood the striking figure of a village conjurer, with long pitch-black hair, the piercing eyes of a madman, an unkempt beard covering his breast, the long powerful arms of a gorilla, dressed in strange operatic attire—the black cassock of a monk, the knee boots of a muzhik, and the cross of a priest glittering through the beard.

Public opinion resented, most of all, Rasputin's interference in church affairs. The "monk" had installed himself as the head of the Orthodox Church, making and breaking bishops and archbishops. His ambition in this field was limited only by the fact that he did not know all the bishoprics. As a native of Siberia, however, he knew all Siberian dioceses by name and he wished to keep them all under his control through his appointees. Kniazev made no secret of his sympathy with the ousted Siberian church dignitaries. His influential friends in St. Petersburg kept him informed about the career of the "monk" at court, and the news promptly leaked from his palace to the local society.

The predominating political mood of the people in Siberia was decidedly against the government and especially against Rasputin, the Tsar, and the Tsarina. But the political parties of the left had few followers outside the circle of political exiles. The S-R party was